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# RICARDO IZNAOLA

## ON PRACTICING

**A manual for students  
of guitar performance**



MEL BAY PUBLICATIONS, INC., #4 INDUSTRIAL DRIVE, PACIFIC, MO 63069



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## PREFACE

This brief manual answers some of the most commonly asked questions about how to practice effectively. It also addresses a few issues frequently left unexplained in discussions on the subject.

The curious reader may want to explore the writings of other authors such as Matthay, Bonpensiere, Havas, Galamian, Leimer, Stanislavski - all of whom have been influential in shaping the practice approach and philosophy described in this booklet. Please also refer to the "Suggestions for Further Reading" at the end of the booklet.

## I BASIS OF GOOD PRACTICE

### 1. INTRODUCTION

What happens on the concert stage is a direct consequence of what happens in the practice room. There is no magic and no mystery: good practice results in good performances. Poor practice will produce poor performances.

In order to learn to practice effectively the performer must first understand the nature of the peculiar challenge posed by a public performance and his capacity to face it not only successfully, but actually enjoy doing it. Loving music, and even loving to play music [for oneself], are not guarantees for success as a performer. One must feel the need to share with others one's music-making in order to become a successful performer.

The practice approach described here is focused on the ultimate goal of successful public performance. To practice well, in this context, means to achieve the goal of playing well in public.



## 2. INNER POISE

The foundation of good practice is the attainment and maintenance of inner poise. Inner poise can be defined as a mental/spiritual state of alertness and readiness for intellectual activity, without emotional tension. It is characterized by the absence of judgmental attitudes about ourselves and by a heightened sense of curiosity. Inner poise can be achieved only when the following conditions are met:

a. Emotional detachment from the material being practiced. We are dispassionate and, therefore, emotionally unaffected by the natural ups-and-downs which happen in the course of practicing. We do not condemn ourselves for the mistakes, although we realistically take notice of them. We behave, and feel, like scientists in a lab. We observe, dispassionately, the results of our experiments.

b. Objective observation of what we are doing and the results we are getting. We do not cover up the glitches. We do not stop listening intently to everything we do. We do not stop observing the physical sensations produced in our playing mechanism by the act of playing.

c. Ease of action in what we are doing. We develop a keen sense for the amount of effort needed to achieve the motions of playing and continuously strive to diminish it. We do not allow difficulty, much less fatigue or pain, to become a part of our approach to playing the instrument. Ease of action is the direct result of our developing a refined muscular sense for outer poise (described later).

When our inner poise is disturbed our practice cannot be optimal. Frequently, this happens when things don't go well and we make mistakes. We become frustrated at our own incompetence and begin to condemn ourselves. Anxiety begins to creep in. Emotional tension builds up and produces physical tension which makes things even more difficult, and we lose ease of action. As a consequence of this process, we also stop listening objectively, partly because we subconsciously try to protect ourselves from the painful feelings of inadequacy and frustration.

We thus enter a vicious circle that only gets worse the more persistent we become in our pseudo-practice. We also gradually lose our motivation and our desire to practice.

We must learn to identify the process described above so that we can stop it at the beginning, before it takes control of our practice.

## 3. OUTER POISE

The physical equivalent of inner poise is outer poise. Outer poise can be defined as the state of alertness and readiness for action of a limb, without dysfunctional tension. It is characterized by sensations of weightlessness and effortlessness. It is an attitude of the limb approximately mid-way between collapse (total relaxation) and rigidity (maximum tension).

Learning to identify and use poise as a norm for physical activity on the instrument is the key to achieving ease of action. In order to do so, we must distinguish between sensations of weight and sensations of effort.

Sensations of weight (falling) are produced when we allow gravity to act upon our limbs. Sensations of effort (lifting; overcoming a resistance) are produced when we overcome the pull of gravity, or some other resistance, through muscular activity.

The poised limb feels as if it were floating because of the balanced opposition between the pull of gravity and the muscular effort needed just to overcome it. It must be clearly understood that poise is a norm, a reference that helps us control the amount of effort needed for a particular motion. A whole spectrum of degrees of exertion is necessary to play the instrument properly.

When and how much exertion to use at any given moment is the problem. Controlling poise at will is the key to the problem.



## II NEGATIVE FACTORS THAT AFFECT PRACTICE

There are a number of factors that, for the most part subconsciously and unwillingly, may affect the quality of our practice.

### 1. MATERIAL OR TANGIBLE FACTORS

a. Difficulty level - the tendency to tackle material that is too difficult for our present level of development. The difficulty may be technical, musical, or a combination of both.

b. Amount of material - the tendency to tackle too many things at once. This shows in the sheer number of pieces to be studied and in the way that specific areas in each piece are dealt with. The tendency is to work on fragments that are too long when dealing with specific problems within the piece.

c. Lack of time - the tendency to rush the practice approach because there is not enough time. The sensation that we don't have enough time is always produced by "c" above, and by certain implicit expectations.

d. The inertia of the rhythmic flow - the tendency to play through a piece from beginning to end, caused by our natural inclination to follow the rhythmic "groove" of the piece. When we play through we are not practicing, but performing. Remember these basic principles:

- If one is performing, the rhythmic flow must not be interrupted, no matter what incidents (mistakes) occur. A performance is a complete, uninterrupted statement.
- If one is practicing, one does not continue playing the piece until one has achieved the pre-set specific goals for that particular fragment. Practicing is, fundamentally, a goal-orientated, detail-focused process of correction and experimentation to improve what has been done before. Although one also practices performing, as we shall see later, this is the culminating stage of practice and can never substitute for the preliminary, detailed work which is the true core of good practice.

e. Tempo - closely associated with 'd'. The tendency to practice at performance tempo prematurely, before our mechanism is really ready to do so. Tempo is one of the last factors to be incorporated into our practice. A good rule-of-thumb is the following schedule of learning stages for a new piece (applies equally to etudes, exercises, solos, ensemble parts, etc.):

1. Pre-rhythmic practice - only concerned with identifying and achieving correct notes through easy, flowing motions. No rhythm, no meter, no tempo.
2. Pre-metrical rhythmic practice - identifying patterns, "gestures", rhythmic groups, and working on their connection without a rigorous metrical continuity. Overriding importance of achieving ease of action.
3. Pre-tempo metrical practice (tempo manipulation) - playing through the piece (or big chunks of it) maintaining the metric feel, but changing tempos as needed to guarantee perfect execution of the more difficult passages. This is the first step towards integration. The idea is to play through without stopping and to manipulate your tempo so that everything is played without mistakes and without excess tension.
4. Slow metrical practice - playing through in time but with a consistent slow tempo. Physical ease is always a first priority. Alternation with previous stages of practice, for further improvement of detail.
5. Tempo practice - the culminating goal. If taken for the piece as a whole, it is identical to performing time practice (described later). It should also be used for fragmentary, spotting-practice (see Chapter V).

Bear two things in mind:

- Sight-reading is not practicing. The goals and processes of good sight-reading are certainly complementary and indispensable, but they fall outside the realm of practicing as discussed here. We will deal with this question in more detail later on.
- So-called "slow practice" is only one of the stages in proper practicing. As our plan suggests, there are preliminary stages that have to be assimilated before slow practice can become effective.



Also, remember that no matter how well we know a piece, all of the above approaches will be useful in keeping our mechanism working with effective ease. Do not hesitate to employ all of these strategies, even with material you know very well. The pay-off will be tremendous.

## 2. INTANGIBLE OR PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

a. Expectations - we all have explicit and implicit expectations, both long- and short-term, concerning what we should do, achieve or realize. Some of these expectations are healthy and necessary to keep our motivation alive. Others, however, have to be understood as negative and detrimental to our organic development as performing artists.

In general terms, the problem begins when we have a non-objective vision of our own capabilities which makes us confuse what we desire or wish with what the reality is.

Typical examples of negative expectations are:

- "I have been playing now for 3 years. I should be able to play a, b or c."
- "I will be ready to play x, y or z by next month."

We must understand that the process of learning to play an instrument well (in general, skill training of any sort) is essentially a process of growth which varies individually.

We cannot accelerate the growth of a tree by pulling its branches.  
Honest realism is a fundamental virtue for all performers.

Respect your individual pace of growth.

Do not allow your (false) expectations [the future] to disrupt the natural unfolding of your practice [the present].

Approach your practice following the advice of the great Russian theatre director Stanislavski: "today, here, now".

b. Memories - the opposite side of the coin. We all carry the burden of our past experiences, good and bad. The good ones serve as fuel for future accomplishments. The bad ones must be left outside the door of our practice room.

Do not allow your (negative) memories [the past] to disrupt the natural unfolding of your practice [the present].

"Today, here, now."

c. Comparisons - other people's achievements can be a positive, inspiring influence. More often than not, they become an obstacle to our self-development if we make value judgments based on comparisons with others.

The tendency to compare ourselves to others is natural in all of us. It is based on that athletic component in human personality that makes us competitive. Because of the very physical nature of performance, it is easy to fall into the trap of seeing prowess as the ultimate goal and the measuring rod for our accomplishments.

One of the keys to successful practice is learning to control these feelings without denying them. We do need a degree of technical prowess to become successful performers. People do expect agility, volume and speed in musical performance.

Audiences do not attend concerts to compare previous performances with the current one. In many ways, a concert resembles many aspects of a love relationship: it is the unique attractiveness of your artistic message and personality that will make you successful. Audiences are, in this context, "promiscuous"; they have an unlimited capacity to "fall in love" with all possible unique artistic messages and personalities.

The old truism still applies: you are only competing with yourself.

We should alter our motto from, "today, here, now", to:

"Me, today, here, now."



### III PURPOSE AND METHOD OF GOOD PRACTICE

The purpose of good practice is to achieve specific goals while focusing on continuous improvement in quality and ease of execution.

The areas in which this process occurs are: technique, musicianship, and performance.

The great violin pedagogue Galamian proposed the methodical distribution of practice time into three time-slots:

a. Building time - in which purely technical concerns are addressed (technical detail)

b. Interpretive time - in which the musicianly elements of expression are tried out and incorporated into the piece (musical detail)

c. Performing time - in which the integration of technique and musicianship occurs, playing through complete pieces or sections, paying attention to the imagined circumstances of a real performance and dealing with problems of concert etiquette, stage fright, etc.

Typically, "a" and "b" deal with detailed, fragmentary, sectional practice, while "c" works on the piece as a whole, as an aesthetically relevant event, not to be interrupted or stopped.

Of course, not all practice sessions have to be rigorously divided this way. At different stages of development, more or less emphasis will be given to one or the other steps. However, one should always be consciously aware of what type of practice is in effect. Do not allow yourself random, blind pseudo-practice, taking it to be true practice.

When one wants to just "fool around" with the instrument, one should do so by all means. Be aware, however, that this is not practicing.

### IV PRACTICE HYGIENE: THE SYSTEM OF PRACTICE

#### 1. MATERIALS

Good practice should incorporate a balanced blend of materials which will include:

a. Exercises - whose purpose is to train the gymnastic capabilities of the playing mechanism (foundation or basic technique).

b. Etudes - whose purpose is to present particular technical procedures within a musical context of moderate extension (applied technique).

c. Repertoire - which is the artistic goal and where the true integration of art and craftsmanship, technique and musicianship, occurs (expressive technique).

The belief that technique can be acquired through work on the repertoire alone is a common fallacy. Since good technique relies on a physically fit playing mechanism, and since artistically conceived works do not have a pre-designed formative technical purpose, technical equipment built on the study of the repertoire alone will always have many weak areas. Its physical fitness component will not be thoroughly trained.

One cannot train one's body to play professional football by just playing. By doing so, one risks injury or, at best, playing a mediocre game.

The same applies, for the same reasons, to musical performance.

Once one has reached an advanced stage of technical development, technical maintenance can be kept up by isolating spots from the repertoire, and selecting a few etudes that we find particularly helpful, etc. This approach, however, is only productive once the formative stages of technical training are well assimilated.



## 2. TIME-ALLOCATION OF MATERIALS

Traditionally, practicing has been undertaken, and its results evaluated, on a day-to-day basis. It is here proposed that the time-unit for practice be considered to be the week: distribute the materials to be practiced (exercises, etudes, repertoire) throughout the week, so that at the end of the week everything has been covered.

This way it is easier to control the amount of time devoted to particular areas, what needs more or less work, while at the same time avoiding the nagging feeling that there is not enough time to work on everything. (Discussed in our previous section on negative factors).

The week should consist of six days only, with a seventh day of rest from practice (although you may play all you want that day!).

For college-level professional students, no practice approach will produce results if done for less than an average of 2 to 3 hours a day. Practicing more than 5 to 6 hours, on the other hand, will begin to produce diminishing returns.

Ideally, daily practice should be divided into three sessions, with sufficient resting time left in between sessions (certainly no less than 10 to 15 minute breaks). If any particular session should go beyond 60 minutes, then further breaks should be taken, but more brief in duration.

An intelligent, flexible and consistent approach to the time allocated to practice will avoid a lot of possible problems related with injuries of the physical mechanism, stress symptoms, deterioration of technique, general health condition, lack of motivation, etc.

Nothing bad happens if one doesn't practice for a couple of days. At the very early stages of development some momentary loss of ability may be noticed which is rapidly corrected once proper practice times are resumed.

With regard to technical practice, such as exercises and etudes, it is wise to alternate the technical procedures used, so that some physical elements rest and rebuild, while others are worked out.

In conclusion, remember that having six days a week as a time-unit of practice means that not everything has to be worked on every day!

## V ESSENCE OF GOOD PRACTICE: PROBLEM-SOLVING

The purpose of good practice was defined in Chapter III as being "to achieve specific goals while focusing on continuous improvement in quality and ease of execution."

These specific goals may be as detailed and small as a single, particular one-fret shift, or as general and big as deciding on how to approach dynamically the first theme in a recap section of a sonata-allegro movement.

In any and all cases the approach is the same: to consider the goal to be achieved as a particular problem presented by the piece at that specific moment.

Practicing, then, becomes a method of problem-solving. Our approach to problem-solving, in this context, has three stages:

a. Identification of the fact that, a) there is a problem, b) what it is, c) where it begins and ends.

It is easy to fall into the trap of overlapping problems (i.e., to consider as one problem what is in reality a series of different problems). Be as precise and detailed as you can in determining the boundaries of a problem area.

b. Understanding the exact causes of a problem. This is a difficult stage for most beginners, as they have not yet acquired sufficient experiences or knowledge of the instrument to be able to pinpoint specifically what creates a problem.

Understanding usually brings with it an appropriate solution to the problem, but it also may require experimentation with several options before the best solution is found.

A great deal of what teachers do in the studio is to help the student identify, and understand, the problems presented by a given piece.

c. Assimilation - the word assimilation means "becoming one with", being absorbed by the nature of something.



In our context this means the process by which, having found a valid solution to a problem, we strive to improve it through guided repetition. In doing so we make the solution a part of us, thus assuring that in performance we have a good guarantee of success when dealing with that particular passage.

This last stage is what is most frequently understood as practicing. The problem is that assimilation through repetition occurs regardless of whether we are doing something right or wrong. If the previous process of identification and understanding has taken place in a less-than-careful manner, and we just indulge in what might be called 'blind repetition', the results could be worse than if we had not practiced at all!

Keep the score at hand at all times during practice, even when the material is memorized. The connection between the written code of the score with the aural events and the physical action of playing is of fundamental importance in developing both technical and memory assurance, as we shall see in Chapter VI below.

A very effective way to solve technical problems quickly and correctly is the technique of spotting, in which the three stages of identification, understanding and assimilation are clearly differentiated and controlled.

a. Either you or the teacher identifies a problem, marking it on the score with a horizontal bracket that begins slightly before, and ends slightly after, the specific problem spot.

Write repeat signs at both ends of the bracket:

[ : : ]

b. You and/or your teacher then study the causes of the problem until a valid solution is found. This is the second stage of understanding the problem.

c. Once the problem has been understood and its solution found, begin practicing the contents of the bracket repeatedly as an uninterrupted exercise. Different tempos should be used. This last stage (assimilation) will be complete when correct habits are formed in the way the particular spot is handled.

Depending on the difficulty level of the problem, the assimilation stage will take more or less time. Typically, finding a good solution for a particular spot will momentarily allow the player to play through it well. At that point

understanding (or what might be called the click reaction) occurs, and the third stage (assimilation through guided repetition) may begin.

Once the problem is on its way to being solved, put it back in context, adding several bars before and after the specific spot. Both when defining the spot, and when it is put back in context, care should be given to creating fragments that make rhythmic sense.

When spotting, make sure you don't begin working on the bracket's content (repetition) until you have a precise idea of what the correct approach to the problem should be. Remember that the process of assimilation - which is, essentially, conditioning of the autonomous, spinal nervous system - will work against you if your approach is faulty. If you practice mistakes, you will learn and perform mistakes.

It should be emphasized that the stages of identification and understanding are the most difficult ones for less experienced players to command. The role of the teacher, in this regard, is indispensable in assuring a correct definition of the exact extent, causes and solution of each particular problem. As mentioned before, the tendency is to consider as a single problem what is, in fact, a series of different problems.

Keep in mind that anything that goes wrong, feels wrong or is difficult, no matter how small it may seem, is to be treated as an isolated problem and improved, or corrected, through proper practice.



## VI MEMORY AND SIGHT-READING: THE QUESTION OF ACCURACY IN PRACTICE AND THE ROLE OF VISUALIZATION

All of the preceding discussion deals, in fact, with the fundamental question of achieving perfect accuracy in our practice. Only then will we have a solid foundation for building a truly artistic performance.

There are eight areas in which we must be accurate before good performance can begin to take place:

- a. Getting the right notes (interpreting pitch notation).
- b. Getting the right duration (interpreting note-value notation).
- c. Getting the right accentuation (interpreting rhythmic/metrical notation).
- d. Getting the right speeds and levels of loudness (interpreting tempo and expression markings).
- e. Getting the right fingering (interpreting instrumental/technical notation).
- f. Getting the right phrasing (interpreting structure).
- g. Getting the right connections throughout the different sections of the piece (interpreting form).
- h. Getting the right emotional and historical feel for the piece (interpreting character and style).

Depending on the type of material being practiced, some of these areas become more relevant than others. Also, their relative level of importance will change as different stages of development are achieved. The last three areas enter the picture at a relatively advanced stage.

Most of the problems affecting many students of musical performance are just inaccuracies in one or more of the areas marked from 'a' to 'e' above, that is to say, errors in reading/memorization of the material.

Sight-reading and memorization are two sides of the same coin. The ability to accurately read and remember the pitches, note-values, rhythms, dynamics (nuances in loudness), agogics (nuances in duration and pacing) and fingering of a piece of music, is the primary goal upon which all other technical and musical goals depend.

Many performers falsely believe that they are bad readers, or have bad memories, because they have not discovered the relatively simple principles that guide a natural, healthy development of these skills.

The following might be of help:

- a. If it is easy enough for you, you can visualize it.
- b. If you can visualize it, you can sight-read it.
- c. If you can visualize it without the instrument and without the score, you can remember it.

To visualize, in this context, means both to see your hands in the motions of playing and to hear the music internally, with your mind's eye and ear.

- d. If it is too difficult, you won't sight-read it well.

The problem with sight-reading is that most players attempt material beyond the reach of their present capabilities. (Note: The last point (d) should be taken with a grain of salt – a general precaution, rather than as a hard and fast rule. Stretching your capabilities, when done in a healthy spirit of 'what if', is a great motivating stimulus.)

The following experiments will give you opportunities to develop these skills while having some challenging fun as well.

### EXPERIMENT NO. 1

- a. Select a short piece or fragment: no more than 2 staves, no more than 8 bars in length, all in first-second positions.
- b. Pitches should not extend beyond the first ledger line in either direction.
- c. Note-values should not be shorter than 1/8th notes.
- d. Meter should be simple duple.
- e. Texture should be in two voices mainly, with occasional 3-voice chords.
- f. No more than one sharp or flat in key signature.
- g. Moderate tempo
- h. Expression markings (dynamics, agogics) should be few in number. Make sure you know what each term means.
- i. Fingering indications should be few and unobtrusive.



Step 1 - Read the fragment without the instrument trying to see, mentally, where your left hand is at all times. Do not worry about note-values, rhythm, meter or tempo at this point. Just figure out and visualize what the left hand must do.

Step 2 - Add visualization of the right hand activity. If right hand fingers are not indicated, mark them before starting. Again, concentrate only on seeing (in your mind) the hands at work for each move, disregarding rhythm, tempo, etc.

NOTE: If visualization of the right hand proves to be too demanding, delete this step.

Step 3 - Begin to feel the rhythmic flow of the piece. Just sing, in a monotone, the note-values while beating time with your right hand. Do this at a very slow pace. Don't visualize hand activity while doing this step.

Step 4 - Try to "see" the hands in action while beating time and singing the note beat values in a monotone. You will probably need to subdivide the fragment into even smaller pieces to be able to do this correctly. Do this very slowly. Do not stop until you manage to "play" mentally through the entire fragment, visualizing your hands in the act of playing.

Step 5 - REST! What you have done is exhausting!

Step 6 - Pick up your instrument and prepare to play. Now you are trying to sight-read through the whole fragment from beginning to end without stopping. You will probably miss many things: notes, values, rhythms and, of course, fingering and expression markings. Not to worry. Your only goal is to play through, trying to maintain rhythmic continuity with the least amount of interruption. Begin to play.

Step 7 - Take a breather and try again. Watch your tempo (don't rush).

Step 8 - You may want to try once more, if your previous attempts have been too hesitant. If you feel fairly satisfied, proceed to step IX.

Step 9 - Try 'Step 4' again - visualization without the instrument - but this time your goal is to hear the music "internally", in all its detail. Many things will be "blurred". Don't worry. Repeat a couple of times and rest.

The process described previously can be applied to all levels of reading and playing ability. The example given assumes the player is a relative beginner with some reading ability. If you are still finding notes on the instrument, try the process on little melodic fragments, using mainly open strings (with a few first position notes), very simple rhythms and long note values (half and quarter notes only).

The point is that you should begin to internalize music and technique as soon as possible.

As your musical experience and knowledge grow and mature, the process will be helped by analytical skills which develop last. These will reinforce the other three elements involved: visual, aural and tactile/kinesthetic.

## EXPERIMENT NO. 2

A common misconception is the belief that one plays from memory only when playing without reading the score. On the contrary, even sight-reading depends on memory to be successful. Every good sight-reader will confirm the fact that one is always reading ahead of the spot being played, even full phrases ahead. The following experiment will help develop your short-term memory skills through visualization.

Step 1 - Using the same fragment as in Experiment No. 1, visualize the first two bars only, without the instrument.

Step 2 - Pick up the instrument and prepare to play. Close your eyes and play those two bars.

Step 3 - Open your eyes and play the same bars, looking only at your left hand.

Step 4 - Do the same, looking at your right hand.

Step 5 - Repeat the process for the rest of the fragment, working on only two bars at a time.

Step 6 - Once you have gone through the whole fragment (8 bars) in this fashion, begin reading from the top again, but try to look one or two bars ahead of where you are playing. Do this several times.



Step 7 - Play the whole fragment from memory. Don't peek! (Don't worry if you are not entirely successful. Eventually, you will be.)

Obviously these procedures are not easy and will take quite a bit of time to master.

**Do not mix your regular practice with visualization practice.**

Practice sight-reading/memorization independently of your regular practice with new material that is well below your true level of technical/musical development.

You may want to try applying some of the visualization techniques to new material that you are just beginning to study, material which is on a par with your real skills as a player. The chances are that, unless you are a proficient visualizer already, you won't be too successful because of the technical/musical complexity of this material.

Once you have begun to regularly devote some time to practicing visualization, you will notice fairly quickly that the general level of accuracy in gathering information from the score will improve markedly and take less time.

The recommended seventh day of rest from regular practice is an ideal opportunity to devote some time (an hour or so) to visualization.

Don't underestimate the powers of visualization. Some distinguished pedagogues (Bonpensiere, Leimer) believed that with proper training one's ability to visualize might eventually become so strong and vivid as to allow for the partial or total elimination of physical practice. Some legendary performers of the not-too-distant past achieved amazing results through visualization, for example Gieseking, Kreisler, Cortot or, more recently, Rubinstein and Arrau. These individuals were capable of learning long, complex new works while on a prolonged train or transatlantic voyage, performing them from memory upon arrival without having once played the piece on the instrument.

**Everything is possible.**

**EXPERIMENT NO. 3**

After having worked for some time on experiments 1 and 2, try this more advanced challenge.

Step 1 - Select a very easy, short (4 to 8 bars) fragment. Visualize, without the instrument, as described in steps 1-4 of experiment 1.

Step 2 - Work on the first two bars, still without the instrument, trying intently to hear the music internally. Don't stop until you achieve clear, precise visualization of these two bars. Describe aloud the contents of these bars. Sing the melody aloud.

Step 3 - Get a piece of staff paper and write down, from memory, those two bars. Try to be precise in reproducing them.

Step 4 - Repeat the process for the whole fragment, working with two bars at a time.

Step 5 - Once you have written down the whole fragment from memory, without having once touched the instrument, get the instrument and prepare to play. Once more visualize the fragment while reading your manuscript (without playing).

Step 6 - With eyes closed visualize the fragment once more.

Step 7 - Put the score away and play the fragment from beginning to end from memory.

The first attempts will most probably not be too successful. This is natural. Rest for a while and try again. Eventually, you will succeed.

As in the case of physical practice, your abilities to visualize will develop gradually. Do not get impatient with yourself. Keep in mind what you have learned about Inner Poise, its fundamental importance in good practice, and how to achieve and maintain it.



## VII THE FUEL FOR GOOD PRACTICE: THE INTERACTION BETWEEN INNER AND OUTER MOTIVATION

### 1. INNER MOTIVATION: DISCIPLINE

No practice approach can be effective if one doesn't work regularly and consistently. One must, first of all, want to practice on a regular and consistent basis. Therefore, how to keep motivated about practicing becomes a fundamental question.

What is traditionally called discipline should be understood as inner motivation, that is to say, the assumed responsibility to act in a pre-determined way in order to achieve goals that are important to us spiritually as individuals.

Discipline, so understood, is the consequence of a desire to act in a goal-oriented way, prompted by internal circumstances (non-material, or spiritual, needs). Those needs have to do with important values, like love, ambition, self-respect, etc.

Having a drive, or being driven, implies the type of attitude that results in discipline. People with drive are, by definition, disciplined in regards to that towards which they are driven. This is the fundamental form of motivation and the one that will eventually lead you to achieve your greatest potential.

You cannot learn to acquire drive. It is there as the natural fuel that sparks the internal combustion of what we call our vocation or calling. It is the "*entheos*" (inner god) of the ancient Greeks - from which the word enthusiasm is derived.

Even when one has a strong sense of drive, an indisputable vocational calling, one's inner motivation (discipline) may falter occasionally. We might not feel like practicing. We are tired, or too involved with other things - like academic work or an exciting romantic relationship - or we feel "blue", being away from home, jobless and poor.

Nothing negative will happen if we interrupt our practice routine for a couple of days. We must also pamper ourselves emotionally and sometimes this requires a momentary retreat to lick our wounds. But the danger of falling

into a rut always exists. We must learn to counteract laziness before it takes control over us.

### 2. OUTER MOTIVATION: DUTY

In artistic performance, the single most important difference between the professional and the amateur is in attitude towards practice.

For the professional, practicing is the most important activity; the amateur rests from other activities to practice. For the professional, practicing is the means to the higher goal of successful public performance; for the amateur, more often than not, practicing is an end in itself, because there are no public performances. For the professional, performing, (and therefore practicing) is the job; for the amateur, it is a hobby.

Acquiring the professional attitude towards practice is a key issue in the development of the performer. It implies accepting the duties inherent in the profession.

A sense of duty differs from discipline in that it is prompted by outer - social - circumstances: respect for someone's authority, fear of negative critical evaluation, fear of public failure, or awareness of the standards generally expected by the professional community, etc.

The student of performance has a duty to obey the teacher's instructions, to prepare well for lessons, to attend classes, lessons, rehearsals, do homework, etc., etc., etc... The professional performer has a duty to be ready to play the concert when scheduled; to know her/his part for ensemble rehearsals; and a duty to achieve the standards of quality required by the profession in general.

This sense of duty will never be a primary motivating force, but it is of great importance to help the student of performance initiate a positive course of action with regard to practice when, for whatever reasons, inner motivation is lacking.

Characteristically, when one doesn't feel like practicing but, nonetheless, begins to do so because one ought to, the desire is gradually awakened and it doesn't take long before one is genuinely motivated to practice. Through our sense of duty we can, thus, regain discipline.



It is this interaction between our outer and inner motivation that will keep us alive, as practitioners of the art, for the duration of our professional careers.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

The following is a short list of books which may prove beneficial to the interested reader:

**Bonpensiere, Luigi:** *New Pathways to Piano Technique - A study of the Relations between Mind and Body with Special Reference to Piano Playing;* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953)

**Galamian, Ivan:** *Principles of Violin: Playing and Teaching;* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962)

**Havas, Kato:** *A New Approach to Violin Playing;* (London: Bosworth, 1961)

**Havas, Kato:** *Stage Fright: Its Causes and Cures;* (London: Bosworth, c. 1973)

**Leimer, Karl** (with Walter Giesecking): *Piano Technique;* (New York: Dover, 1972)

**Matthay, Tobias:** *Musical Interpretation: Its Laws and Principles, and Their Application in Teaching and Performing;* (London: Joseph Williams, c. 1913)

**Matthay, Tobias:** *On Memorizing;* (London: Oxford University Press, c. 1922)

**Matthay, Tobias:** *The Visible and Invisible in Pianoforte Technique;* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932)

**Moore, Sonia:** *The Stanislavski System;* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984)





### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

One of the most attractive personalities of the guitar world, Ricardo Iznaola pursues a brilliant, multifaceted, musical career. Mr. Iznaola, an American citizen, was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1949. His activities as a performer, composer, pedagogue, lecturer, and writer have been distinguished by international critical acclaim and the admiration of colleagues and audiences alike. He has been called "one of the most seminal players, teachers and thinkers of the guitar scene today" (*Soundboard Magazine*) and an "expressive, full of character, persuasive and assured musician with flair as well as technique" (*Los Angeles Times*).

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